

NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0404
CHARLES WEISS/JERUSALEM

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MOUNT MORIAH

INTRO:

ONE OF THE THINGS ACITATING THE ARAB INHABITANTS OF THE WEST BANK OF THE JORDAN IN THE LATEST WAVE OF UNREST HAS BEEN MOSLEM FEARS OF JEWISH ENCROACHMENT IN THE SACRED MOSLEM COMPOUND ON MOUNT MORIAH IN JERUSALEM. CHARLES WEISS HAS THIS REPORT:

ANNCR:

MOUNT MORIAH IS WHERE SOLOMON CONSTRUCTED HIS TEMPLE AND WHERE HEROD LATER REBUILT IT. ALL THAT REMAINS IS PART OF THE TEMPLE AREA'S RETAINING WALLS REVERED BY THE JEWS TO THIS DAY AS THE WESTERN WALL. THE CREST OF THE MOUNT IS A MOSLEM HOLY PLACE. THE VAST PLAZA, ONE HUNDRED FIFTY BY ONE HUNDRED METERS, CONTAINS TWO ANCIENT MOSQUES, BOTH DATING MORE OR LESS BACK TO THE EIGHTH CENTURY. ONE OF THEM IS THE DOME OF THE ROCK, AN EIGHT SIDED BUILDING IN BLUE TILE, CAPPED BY A DOME IN SHINING GOLD. IT IS BUILT OVER THE ROCK ON WHICH, ACCORDING TO MOSLEM TRADITION, ABRAHAM OFFERED ISAAC IN SACRIFICE TO GOD AND FROM WHICH MOHAMMED ASCENDED TO HEAVEN. THE OTHER MOSQUE IS AL-AQSA, A LARGE RECTANGULAR EDIFICE WHERE FRIDAY SERVICES ARE GENERALLY HELD. THE TWO MOSQUES CONSTITUTE WHAT THE MOSLEMS REVERE AS THE THIRD HOLIEST SITE IN ISLAM AFTER MECCA AND MEDINA. VISITORS CAN COME INTO THE COMPOUND THE HARAM AL-SHARIF DURING DAYLIGHT HOURS EVERY DAY BUT FRIDAY, THE MOSLEM DAY OF PRAYER.

JEWS CALL THE SITE THE TEMPLE MOUNT AND HAVE AMBIVALENT FEELINGS ABOUT VISITING IT. ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE, ONLY MEMBERS OF THE PRIESTLY FAMILY WERE PERMITTED TO ENTER THE HOLY OF HOLIES IN THE TEMPLE. SINCE THE TEMPLE NO LONGER STANDS, THERE IS NO WAY OF KNOWING WHERE THE HOLY OF HOLIES WAS. AND OBSERVANT JEWS GENERALLY AVOID THE TEMPLE MOUNT. NEVERTHELESS THERE ARE NATIONALIST JEWISH ELEMENTS WHO SINCE THE SIX-DAY WAR HAVE TRIED TO ESTABLISH A JEWISH PRESENCE ON THE MOUNT AND THIS IS THE ROOT OF MOSLEM FEARS.

ISRAELI POLICE, OUT OF CONSIDERATION FOR MOSLEM SENSITIVITIES, HAVE BANNED JEWISH SERVICES THERE SINCE NINETEEN SIXTY-SEVEN AND IN NINETEEN SEVENTY, THE SUPREME COURT UPHELD THEIR ACTION. THEN, LAST MAY, A GROUP OF JEWS DEFIED THE BAN AND HELD A PRAYER MEETING. LATER THEY WERE ARRESTED ON A BREACH OF THE PEACE CHARGE. IN JANUARY A JERUSALEM MAGISTRATE ACQUITTED THEM. HE SAID THERE WAS NO REASON THE POLICE SHOULD PREVENT JEWS FROM PRAYING ON THE MOUNT. NEVERTHELESS THE POLICE, WITH GOVERNMENT SANCTIONS, ARE STILL STOPPING JEWS FROM PRAYING THERE. THE STATE HAS APPEALED THE MAGISTRATE'S VERDICT BUT A FURTHER COURT HEARING HAS YET TO BE HELD.

EC/PY